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By Otto Kreisher

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House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee members Tuesday expressed concerns over the Army's impact on two communities, one because of the thousands of personnel moving there and one because troops are not coming as expected.

During the panel's review of the Army's fiscal 2010 funding request, members also pressed the service's leaders on the dramatic changes in Future Combat Systems, the effort to reverse the massive shift of work to outside contractors, and the record suicide rate among soldiers.

Reps. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., and Sanford Bishop, D-Ga., protested the sudden reversal of the Army's plans to move two brigades of troops to Fort Stewart, Ga., after it had urged the nearby communities to invest in improvements to support the 27,000 additional soldiers and their families. That move was canceled after Defense Secretary Robert Gates stopped the Army's buildup at 45 brigades, rather than 48.

Kingston said the city of Hinesville and other jurisdictions spent \$38 million for schools and other improvements and private contractors spent millions more on housing and other facilities. "What can we do to compensate these folks? What else can the Army put there?" he asked.

Bishop demanded to know if the change was budget-driven. Army Secretary Pete Geren said there was little budget impact from Gates' decision to use the additional soldiers to fully man 45 brigades rather than build additional units.

But he agreed that "the community has gone out on a limb" at the Army's request. "We want to look at ways to mitigate that situation."

Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Murtha, D-Pa., told the Georgians "we're going to work this out" and find ways to reimburse the community. "This is unacceptable to us."

Rep. James Moran, D-Va., demanded to know how the Army could justify its decision to move 20,000 Army personnel from facilities near the Pentagon, well served by public transit, to Fort Belvoir, in an area south of Washington with over-burdened highways and no public transit.

Geren said the Army was only following the decisions of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure commission.

Murtha asked the status of the mandate he has pushed to cut the army of contractors doing work service members or defense civilians should be doing.

Geren said the Army has added personnel to take over many of those out-sourced jobs and will hire another 6,000. But contractors will continue to fill many jobs, he said.

Rep. Norman Dicks, D-Wash., questioned the logic of Gates' decision to stop the manned ground vehicle part of the FCS program, a major component of the project.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey, said Gates did not think the planned vehicles could meet current threats, but the Army would use research already done to produce a new line of combat vehicles.